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AUTHOR	Allen, Lili; Almeida, Cheryl; Steinberg, Adria
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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the experiences of five high schools in Boston, Massachusetts, a district with a successful history of career pathways and academies that, in the last 3 years, has encouraged schools to restructure entirely into smaller learning communities. The schools work to benchmark curriculum to high standards, ensure effective instructional practice, implement multiple and ongoing assessments, create small learning communities, reduce student-teacher ratios, create respectful learning environments, and build partnerships with families, communities, businesses, and higher education. Data from interviews and document reviews at these schools indicate that a strong curricular leader is essential to developing a strong, effective learning community; tensions result from decisions regarding how to fully cluster students and teachers into small learning communities; it is difficult to maintain basic services for bilingual students; it is difficult to balance the desire of teachers for input into staffing decisions with the need to ensure that students have equal access to a range of pathways; and it is challenging to focus simultaneously on implementing new district initiatives directed at preparing students for high stakes tests and on restructuring schools into small learning communities using inquiry-based, contextual learning strategies. The research methodology is appended. (Contains 18 references.) (SM)

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Wall to Wall: Implementing Small Learning Communities in Five Boston High Schools

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a program of
The Education Alliance
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222 Richmond Street, Suite 300
Providence, RI 02903-4226

Phone: 401/274-9548
Fax: 401/421-7650
E-mail: info@lab.brown.edu
Web: www.lab.brown.edu

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Districts face challenges and opportunities when they choose small learning communities (SLCs) as a whole school reform strategy for their high schools. This paper looks at the experience of five high schools in Boston, Massachusetts, a district that has a successful history of career pathways and academies and that, in the last three years, has encouraged schools to restructure entirely into smaller learning communities.

In a period of heightened interest in high school reform, the move to create small learning environments in large, comprehensive high schools is receiving attention as a key strategy. Fueling interest in this strategy is a growing body of evidence that smaller school size has positive effects on student engagement and achievement, especially for students from low-income families.[1] On the basis of such positive research, some urban districts have made smaller learning communities a centerpiece of their high school reform strategy. To support this work, the U.S. Department of Education recently launched a new "small schools" initiative, providing support to districts committed to reorganizing entire schools into smaller units.

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Reorganizing a large comprehensive high school entirely into smaller learning communities is decidedly different from allowing schools-within-a-school, clusters, or career academies to emerge based on the interests and commitment of a group of teachers and students. A school-within-a-school or career academy attracts teachers interested in experimentation with school structure and pedagogy, and it provides students with an alternative environment within the large comprehensive high school. Often, but not always, the program has entrance requirements or a grade or attendance threshold that students must meet to stay in the program. When entire schools restructure into SLCs, all members of the school community—students, teachers, and administrators—participate in the restructuring. What was once an option for a small subgroup of students and teachers becomes a mandate for all, requiring school-wide changes in how all students and teachers in a building work together.

While evidence points to the improved outcomes of students in small schools, or in schools-within-a-school, and information exists on how to start up a school-within-a-school, much less information is available on the results or implementation of SLCs as a whole school reform strategy. Now, three years into a district-wide reform effort that called upon all high schools to institute SLCs, Boston provides insight into the questions that arise when restructuring a large comprehensive urban high school into smaller learning environments. What have been the implementation challenges? Have schools moved beyond restructuring "on paper" to make real changes in the way students are taught and the way learning is organized? How does a headmaster respond to this mandate in the face of all the other mandates s/he faces?[2] What trade-offs are necessary? Can, or should, a school advance a coherent instructional agenda when it is dividing into sub-units? What is the influence of, and impact upon, particular populations such as bilingual students and students with low literacy skills? How do district policies help or hinder the restructuring process?

The five Massachusetts high schools that form the basis for this paper—Brighton, Burke, Charlestown, Dorchester, and East Boston—vary in many ways.[3] For example, they range in size from about 650 students at the Burke to 1,140 at East Boston. Yet despite their differences, all five schools share many challenges associated with most urban schools. For example, they serve young people from diverse backgrounds (49 percent African American, 26 percent Hispanic, 15 percent White, and 9 percent Asian), and the majority of students perform poorly on standardized achievement tests. Approximately one-third of the high student population is limited English proficient or is from households where English is not the first language.

In the coming years, more and more districts will face the dilemmas that these five schools have encountered, as the growing body of research on the benefits of small schools and accompanying calls for policy changes push districts toward rethinking the structure of all schools within their boundaries.

[1] Findings suggest that students in downsized schools are more satisfied with their schooling (Lindsay, 1982; Burke, 1987; Fouts, 1994; Gordon, 1992), are more academically productive (Lee & Smith, 1993, 1994; Lee, Smith, & Croninger, 1995; Robinson-Lewis, 1991), outperform comparison groups in comprehensive high schools with respect to percentage passing and credits earned (McMullen, Sipe, & Wolf, 1994; Crain, Heebner, & Si, 1992), are less likely to drop out (D'Amico & Adelman, 1986; Dayton, 1987; Gordon, 1992; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987), and have more positive self-concepts (Robinson-Lewis, 1991). Furthermore, research indicates that the advantages of smaller learning communities are most acute for disadvantaged and marginal students, such as those populating large urban school systems (Lee & Smith, 1993).

[2] Boston refers to high school principals as "headmasters."

[3] See the Appendix for a discussion of methodology for this paper.

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Key Findings

While deciding on an organizational structure is a first critical step in reshaping large comprehensive high schools into smaller, more personal and more meaningful learning environments for students, it is only the first of many in the arduous process of school reform. The interviews that are the foundation for the findings presented in this section reveal that the five Boston high schools faced a number of tensions or challenges in their restructuring journey. These are summarized as follows:

1 Schools are finding it challenging to focus their efforts simultaneously on implementing new district initiatives directed at preparing students for high stakes tests and on restructuring the school into small learning communities using inquiry-based, contextual learning strategies.

2 Schools are struggling with tensions resulting from decisions regarding how fully to cluster students and teachers into small learning communities.

3 A strong curricular leader is essential to developing a strong and effective small learning community. Schools are using a variety of approaches to make certain that they have effective leadership.

4 In going wall-to-wall with small learning communities, schools are balancing the desire of teachers for input into staffing decisions with the need to make sure that students have equal access to a range of pathways.

5 As schools have formed more small learning communities, bilingual programs within those schools have struggled to maintain basic services to bilingual students and to make sure that there is equitable access to upper-grade pathways; inadequate levels of staffing have compounded the problem.

A Call to Action

We know that most of our high schools as they currently exist are not working for the people who are trying hard to make them work. . . . The traditional high school organization of short class periods, discrete subject areas, and teachers working alone in their classrooms may have worked at one time, but it is clear that it no longer meets the needs of a rapidly changing society and world. Today's high school students must be prepared to make connections across cultures and fields of knowledge. They must be prepared to take on work that requires independent thinking and problem solving. . . . ***If Boston high schools adopt individual or isolated restructuring practices, there is little chance of having significant impact on student achievement. What is needed is a comprehensive and systemic approach to reform.*** *(Emphasis in original)*

— Boston High School Restructuring Task Force

With that call to action in spring of 1998, the Boston High School Restructuring Task Force articulated the imperative for substantial change in Boston's high schools. The product of an unprecedented agreement to embark on significant high school reform, embedded in new teacher contract language, the Task Force consisted of members jointly appointed by Superintendent of Schools Thomas Payzant and Boston Teachers' Union President Edward Doherty. The members drew upon many sectors of the community—teachers, parents, and administrators—and the Task Force had the support of a small resource group of educators that prepared materials and agendas for meetings.

Significantly, the High School Restructuring Task Force followed on the heels of a 15-year scale-up of school-community partnerships and school-to-career practices in the Boston Public Schools, as well as a framework for whole school change instituted by Superintendent Payzant

in 1996 and supported by Annenberg Foundation challenge funds. In 1982, business leaders, higher education institutions, and the Boston Public Schools had created the Boston Compact, an historic community agreement to improve the educational outcomes of students. Revised several times since then, the Compact continues to form the backbone of a community-wide commitment to improving and expanding learning opportunities for young people. In particular, the 1994 Compact moved the business community beyond support and advocacy to a more intimate involvement in the educational process: employers pledged to promote a school-to-career system that would extend the classroom to worksites and to implement structured learning plans that would complement academic work in school.[4]

In the early years of the Compact, several high schools had collaborated with the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) to implement career pathways that clustered students interested in a career area (for example, health occupations, business, and travel and tourism) in academic and career-related courses with designated teachers. The clusters provided students with a sequence of work-based learning opportunities, from job shadowing to full-scale internships. A handful of schools had begun similarly structured "academies" in collaboration with the PIC and the National Academy Foundation, which offered access to national resources and curriculum.

In 1994, the Boston Public Schools Office of School-to-Career had aggressively advanced career pathways as a vehicle for whole school change. That year, the district designated four high schools as school-to-career schools, based on their commitment to moving toward using school-to-career as a strategy for whole school change.

[4] The 2000 Compact has three goals: 1) meet the high standards challenge, 2) increase opportunities for college and career success; and 3) recruit and prepare the next generation of teachers and principals.

The next year, recognizing that the terms of schools' commitment under the designation were not clearly delineated, key members of Boston's School-to-Career Partnership, including leaders from the Boston Public Schools, the PIC and other private-sector partners, and Jobs for the Future, developed a clear, consistent definition of school-to-career education and what it meant for schools to be part of it. The definition required school-to-career schools to begin dividing into smaller learning environments, called career pathways, that would fulfill specific requirements for integrating academic and worksite learning *(see next section)*. In addition to providing an organizational framework, the definition also made clear that simply grafting career-based activities onto a status quo of academic study was insufficient.

Schools interested in becoming school-to-career schools had to agree to implement the career pathway requirements. In the second round of application, the district had designated six more high schools as school-to-career for the 1996-1997 school year, based on demonstrated commitment and capacity to reorganize into pathway programs.

Boston Public Schools Career Pathways

As defined by the Boston Public Schools, a Career Pathway:

- Clusters students in several courses, including two academic subjects per year, for two, three, or four years, with the curriculum organized around a career theme
- Uses an applied, project-based approach to teaching, with the industry or career theme as the context for instruction

- Provides a progressive sequence of worksite experiences that is integrated with academic learning
- Offers career and personal development that includes general career exploration and skills development, as well as specialized study related to the career theme
- Makes connections to post-secondary options

At the same time as targeted schools were scaling-up their school-to-career efforts, the Boston Public Schools launched the Boston Plan for Whole-School Change, developed by BPS collaborators on Boston's Annenberg Challenge. The six essentials for whole school change include:

- Identifying and using a school-wide instructional focus to meet students' needs
- Looking at student work and data in relation to the citywide learning standards
- Creating a targeted professional development plan
- Learning and using best teaching practices
- Looking at resources and aligning them with the instructional focus
- Involving parents and the community in the citywide learning standards and assessments

By the time the High School Restructuring Task Force met in 1997-98 to articulate a set of principles to guide schools in their change efforts, Boston had gained national recognition for its school-to-career practices. At the same time, it had run into roadblocks moving the whole school change principles forward at the high school level. Like many other cities, Boston was finding it more challenging to implement whole school change in the complex organizational environment of the high school than at the lower levels.

Drawing from the experiences of the school-to-career schools and from emerging research on teaching and learning at the high school level and on high school change, the Task Force articulated ten key practices. These were designed to move schools toward standards-based and personalized learning environments, varied and contextualized instructional strategies, and an extended array of supports to help students reach challenging standards, both during and beyond the school day. In addition, several of the practices push schools toward closer collaborations with other vital institutions affecting the lives of young people, including families, business, higher education, and community-based organizations.

PRACTICES FOR HIGH SCHOOL RESTRUCTURING IN BOSTON

1 **Benchmarking Curriculum to High Standards:** Schools must align curriculum with citywide standards, and all students are expected to meet the same high standards regardless of the pathways they select.

2 **Ensuring Effective Instructional Practice:** Teaching practices must focus on applied and inquiry-based learning and the use of problem-solving strategies.

3 **Implementing Multiple and Ongoing Assessments:** Students should be assessed through alternative measures such as collaborative assessment, portfolios, exhibitions, and competency-based graduation.

4 **Creating Small Learning Communities:** The large, impersonal high school must divide into smaller learning units, with a group of teachers responsible for a specific group of students. Options include school-within-a-school models, academies organized around a particular theme, career pathways, or multi-grade or single-grade clusters.

5 **Flexible Use of Time:** Alternative schedules, such as block scheduling or extended-day, ensure that students can participate in applied learning experiences and gain deep knowledge through sustained work.

6 **Reduced Student-Teacher Ratio:** This can be achieved through alternative scheduling, course integration, and reallocation of resources.

7 **Extending the Classroom to the Workplace and the Community:** In collaboration with business and community partners, high schools should structure outside learning experiences, such as work-based internships, community service learning, and field-based projects connected to academic instruction.

8 **Creating a Personalized and Respectful Learning Environment:** Schools should be organized to provide support services such as advising, mentoring, and academic support, to ensure that all students can achieve high standards.

9 **Developing and Sustaining a Collaborative Professional Culture:** Teachers must have opportunities for professional growth through ongoing coaching, developing curriculum, participating in study groups, and team teaching.

10 **Building Partnerships: Family, Community, Business, Higher Education:** Schools must develop strong partnerships with all sectors of the community to support student learning through internships, mentoring, or service learning.

While Boston expected that every high school would eventually address all these practices in a multi-year process of comprehensive restructuring, the Task Force report offered two timelines for reform. Schools could apply for fast-track, Option One designation by writing a proposal detailing their reform plan and specifying which significant aspects of the reform agenda they would be ready to implement in the fall of 1998. For other schools, 1998-99 would be a planning year; all schools were expected to implement school-wide reform beginning in September 1999.

SCHOOL STRUCTURES

In large part because of groundwork they had laid over the previous decade, all five schools selected for Option One status proposed some variant of the school-to-career model. For example, Brighton High staff voted to move forward quickly in their restructuring efforts in part because of the positive outcomes for students in the Boston PIC's ProTech health pathway and other career pathways. Most schools opted to cluster students into career pathways; others combined career pathways or grade-level clustering with career-related courses as junior- and senior-year electives.

The ten principles for high school restructuring did offer schools considerable flexibility in their designs, as the different structures of the Option One schools in 1999-2000 demonstrate (see charts on pages 7 and 8). As these charts indicate, the schools have selected among three approaches to creating smaller learning units out of their large comprehensive high schools.

- Lower-grade (9-10) house with upper-grade (11-12) pathways or career electives (Charlestown and East Boston)
- Ninth-grade cluster with grade 10-12 pathways (Brighton and Dorchester)
- Grade-level clustering, combined with school-to-career electives in the upper grades (Burke)

Brighton High School 1999-2000

Grades 10, 11, and 12	Combination of 5- and 6-period days			
	Small Learning Community: School of Business and Technology	Small Learning Community: School of Health Profession	Small Learning Community: School of Law, Government and Public Service	Small Learning Community: School of Media Arts and Communication
Grade 9	5-period days Transition Programs: Grade 9 Academy			

Compiled by the Office of High School Restructuring, March, 2000

Charlestown High School 1999-2000

Upper School Grades 11 and 12	7-period days			
	Communication Technology Pathway	Finance and Economics Pathway	Hospitality, Event and Conference Planning Pathway	Law and Justice Pathway
Lower School Grades 11 and 12	Ungraded 2-year Small Learning Community (Teachers Loop) 6-period day (60 minutes each)			
	Unit A	Unit B	Unit C	Unit D

Compiled by the Office of High School Restructuring, February, 2000

East Boston High School 1999-2000

Upper House Grades 11 and 12	7-period days					
	Travel and Tourism Pathway (166 students)	Health Professions Pathway (96 students)	Teach Boston Pathway (65 students)	Entrepreneur-ship Pathway (65 students)	FACTS Program and Alternative Program (60 students)	Arts and Communica-tion Pathway (65 students)
Lower House Grades 9 and 10	Success Academy Alternative Program (100 students)		10th Grade Cluster (174 students)		Bilingual Cluster: 9th and 10th Grade (158 students)	
	9th Grade Cluster 1 (110 students)		9th Grade Cluster 2 (110 students)	9th Grade Cluster 3 (110 students)		

Compiled by the Office of High School Restructuring, March, 2000

Note: Every student belongs to a Small Learning Community; every SLC has a common Planning Time.

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Dorchester High School 1999-2000

Grades 10, 11, and 12	6-period days			
	Leadership Academy: Grade 9 Repeaters 2nd year	Performing Arts Academy	Academy of Public Service	
	Bilingual Cluster/SPED Cluster/Lab Cluster			
	Pilot Bilingual and SPED Inclusion Program	OSDC	Entrepreneurship and Business Academy	Engineering/ Technology Academy
Grade 9	Freshman Academy			

Compiled by the Office of High School Restructuring, February, 2000

Jeremiah Burke High School 1999-2000

Upper School Grades 11 and 12	5 blocks per day			
	CAREER PATHWAYS			
	Information Technology	Arts and Communication	Math/Science Engineering	Business Entrepreneurship
	Small Learning Community #4 (Grade 12)			Bilingual/LEP Small Learning Community #5 (Step 1 and 2)
	Small Learning Community #3 (Grade 11)			
Lower School Grades 9 and 10	Small Learning Community #1 (Grades 9 and 10)	Small Learning Community #2 (Grades 9 and 10)		

Compiled by the Office of High School Restructuring, March, 2000

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Discussion of Key Findings

Finding 1: Schools are finding it challenging to focus their efforts simultaneously on implementing new district initiatives directed at preparing students for high stakes tests and on restructuring the school into small learning communities using inquiry-based, contextual learning strategies.

In 1998-99, as Boston high schools began to restructure in response to the Task Force's mandate, the district began in earnest to prepare for the year 2003 state-wide requirement that students pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test to graduate. That year, the superintendent launched a transition program for students in grades 3, 6, and 9 who had scored at level 1, the lowest level, in reading or math on the city's interim assessment vehicle, the Stanford 9, in grades 2, 5, or 8.

The transition program was designed as a 15-month effort (summer + school year + summer) to offer more intensive literacy and math instruction to students performing at low levels. The goal was to achieve more time on task in critical areas and to provide more support in the classroom for teaching literacy throughout the curriculum. The district provided each school a per-pupil allotment of funds and offered a menu of components to meet the goals of the program from which schools could select. Options included hiring a literacy specialist to work with classroom teachers to infuse literacy into all content areas, instituting a safety net program for students with the lowest literacy skills, and providing additional instructional materials. All schools were expected to offer at least 80 minutes of English language arts. At the same time, the district instituted more stringent promotion policies to make certain that students who moved on to upper grades were prepared to meet the challenges of standardized tests.

The district also asked schools to undertake formative assessment efforts. For example, through "Looking at Student Work," teams of teachers examined student work to establish common benchmarks and focus on instructional improvement; alternatively, through administering writing prompts, students across a school responded in writing to a common prompt.

The initiation of district initiatives to prepare students for the MCAS at the same time that the five Option One schools began restructuring had a profound impact on the schools' structures and instructional focus. Woven throughout the Task Force's principles are calls for applied, inquiry-based learning, but this type of learning opportunity appeared to be taking a back seat to pressures to use traditional teaching strategies focused on covering the material to be tested. In addition, the resources demanded by the transition program decreased the schools' ability to create theme-based SLCs.

STRUCTURING THE TRANSITION PROGRAM

The demands of the transition program affected organizational decisions at many Option One schools. Some, such as Charlestown and Dorchester, created a ninth-grade transition cluster, separate from other ninth-grade clusters, and offered the prescribed intensive services only to those students. Headmasters interviewed, concerned about the perceived high costs of the program, declared that this option was less expensive than offering transition services to all ninth-grade students.

However, offering transition services only to selected students ran the risk of negative labeling by the students themselves or by their peers, with damaging consequences to their self-esteem and sense of efficacy as learners. One Charlestown teacher told of transition students describing themselves as "the dumb unit." Separating transition students can be logistically complicated as well. For these reasons, Charlestown's headmaster decided to offer transition services to all ninth-grade students in the 2000-01 school year.

Other Option One schools provided transition services in the 1999-2000 school year to all incoming ninth-grade students to avoid segmenting the classes. This was the case at Brighton High School, which had implemented grade 9-12 pathways in 1998-99, and then reorganized in 1999-2000 into grade 10-12 pathways with a ninth-grade cluster. The headmaster initially had reservations about offering a separate ninth-grade cluster: he favored engaging students as quickly as possible in course work focusing on their interests via career pathways and liked giving teachers full ownership of their students, from grades 9 through 12. After piloting the ninth-grade cluster for a year, he changed his thinking, in large part because he felt students could now make better-informed choices about upper-level pathways. In 1999-2000, freshmen could take advantage of a pilot program with Boston College, "Tools for Tomorrow," that combined character development with career exploration and helped students prepare for entry into pathways in their sophomore year.

RESOURCES PRESSURES

The major trade-off in offering all students the intensive literacy services that transition requires, while instituting more stringent promotion policies, relates to the allocation of school resources to the program. According to headmasters, this results in fewer staff in the upper grades. Specifically, this can mean fewer teachers and administrators for upper-grade pathways, which can mean fewer pathway-specific courses (such as health careers or entrepreneurship) or, equally damaging to the intent of pathways, fewer teacher-leaders or administrators with time to lead pathways.

In fact, it takes leadership, time, and resources to develop and sustain several practices explicitly outlined by the High School Restructuring Task Force, including creating a personalized and respectful learning environment, developing and sustaining a collaborative professional culture, and extending the classroom to the workplace and the community. Most important, staff with leadership skills need time during the school day to navigate these changes through numerous obstacles and roadblocks. These practices are at risk in the upper grades in schools that have assigned additional staff to the lower grades to prepare students for standardized tests.

This tension is likely to increase in the short run with the approach of the implementation of the MCAS tests as a graduation requirement in 2003. In 2000-2001, the superintendent will unveil a new math initiative, which will require double-blocked math classes for students at risk of failing the MCAS. In addition to exacerbating resources pressures throughout the school, this has particular ramifications for the involvement of bilingual students in pathways. At Charlestown High School, for example, the bilingual program director assigned ESL and bilingual staff to teach native language and ESL pathway courses, but she is concerned that she will have to pull those teachers from the upper level and assign them to the lower-grade courses to cover the double-blocked math classes.

ALIGNING MCAS PREPARATION WITH INTERDISCIPLINARY, INQUIRY-BASED PROJECTS

Compounding the problems of resource allocations at the upper grades is the concern expressed by many people involved in high school restructuring initiatives that the MCAS is having a negative impact on their ability to implement new teaching strategies, such as project-based and work-based learning. Especially in Brighton, East Boston, and Charlestown high schools, which are long-standing school-to-career schools, these strategies have proven effective in engaging students and pushing them to do high-quality work. This frustration is most often voiced by those who saw themselves as the forerunners of the current high school restructuring effort. These teachers

and administrators embraced the district's earlier commitment to school-to-career and organized their schools around career pathways, participated in professional development on project-based learning, and involved students in work-based learning opportunities.

These staff are concerned that many at the school-building and district levels see preparation for the MCAS as divergent from the contextual learning approaches embraced by school-to-career proponents and endorsed by the Restructuring Task Force. They claim that an intensive focus on writing prompts, examining student work, and engaging in other literacy-intensive initiatives divorced from a contextually based approach has taken time, energy, and resources away from the creation of the cross-disciplinary, real-world projects that form the heart of career pathways. "I think some teachers know how to do both foundation skills and applied learning at the same time, but there's no commitment to doing the professional development that most teachers need to reconcile these," said one long-time pathway teacher.

Signature projects that involve multiple disciplines and relate to the pathway theme are central to the creation of an identity in the SLC and to securing student engagement. Other techniques for creating an SLC culture that engages students include: offering field trips, in-school showcases (for example, newsletters and events developed by a pathway) and other special activities; creating t-shirts featuring the pathway logo; and providing pathway-related internships and other community-connected learning activities.

These strategies appear to matter. When students were interviewed about their experience in small learning communities, they invariably mentioned the projects and other extras as central to their involvement in the school. At a focus group of pathway students at East Boston High School, students talked about those activities that create pathway coherence as important to them in their experience of the small learning communities. "The literary trail was fun," said several, referring to a project in which they read Hawthorne, Longfellow, and other local authors, then designed tours and led travel groups to related landmarks. Other students responded to similar questions about their most memorable learning experience with stories about experiential learning. "Our study visit to New York City to learn about business practices in the garment industry was great," said several. "We should do more projects like these in all pathways," was a view expressed by many students.

Other administrators were more comfortable with the trade-offs in focusing on literacy and numeracy at the expense of interdisciplinary, applied learning projects. "If we tried to hold teachers accountable for both, we'd overwhelm them," said one administrator. Said one central staff person, "The problem is one of standards. It will simply take more time to prepare these students for high standards, no matter what the assessment mechanism. Other things are going to get squeezed out."

It appears that district- and school-level leaders might be able to alleviate some of the pressure on teachers by better articulating the alignment between restructuring a high school into smaller learning communities or pathways and preparing students for high standards—and by targeting professional development to meet both mandates.

Finding 2: Schools are struggling with tensions resulting from how to fully cluster students and teachers into small learning communities.

DEGREES OF CLUSTERING

All five Option One high schools are establishing a vision for creating SLCs, but most have only begun the difficult work of translating that vision into a reality. Burke and Brighton have clustered all students into SLCs, with students taking most of their courses within their SLC. Charlestown has fully clustered lower-grade students but not upper-grade students: belonging to a grades 11-12 pathway at Charlestown has meant participating in a double-block pathway course but not sharing academic courses. East Boston has achieved close to full clustering in some, but not all, SLCs. Dorchester clusters students in the long-standing Academy of Public Service; in other areas, pathway students have taken a competency course together and likely also shared an English class.

In part, this variation reflects differing views of the desirability of restructuring a large comprehensive high school into SLCs. Clustering cuts at the heart of many traditional school practices, and there is an undercurrent of sentiment among some teachers that SLCs will destroy the common vision and school unity that existed prior to reforms. Restructuring schools must contend with an idealized past, even though fragmentation among departments and stratification among students were often present in the traditional large, comprehensive high school. Furthermore, the traditional culture of teaching has been characterized by closed doors rather than collaboration. Some teachers resist restructuring, viewing attempts to make education more relevant through career pathways as pandering to students who should just work harder to achieve.

There are also issues of feasibility. Long-standing administrative structures support the organization of schools around academic disciplines rather than broad themes. The school schedule, complicated in a traditional high school, is a tangled web in a school that clusters students into major courses while allowing students to take some courses with peers from other pathways. Many teachers have concerns that a restructured school is a splintered school, without a common vision.

One school administrator suggested that some teachers may resist reorganizing schools into SLCs because it unsettles the familiarity of seniority and departmentally organized structures. With SLCs, junior and senior faculty have the same opportunities to progress to leadership positions, such as teacher-facilitators. "We've seen some terrific new teachers take on leadership roles that they wouldn't have been able to take on in previous years," said one interviewee. In addition, teachers may resist restructuring because they may be asked to teach in areas, or grades, that are outside their comfort level.

Some schools have dealt with these challenges by clustering only teachers who are interested in working together. Charlestown is, in effect, restructuring the school from the bottom up, rather than requiring upper-level academic teachers to work in interdisciplinary teams. Other schools have done the same, although less explicitly. Administrators in these schools hope that, eventually, all teachers will gain a favorable view of the collaborative culture in interdisciplinary teams and want to get involved.

Brighton High School first opted not to cluster students but to cluster teachers (whether or not they share students) so that they could begin to experience a collaborative professional culture. While school administrators envisioned that each pathway would cluster students for all core courses (math, science, English, social studies, and the career competency course), in 1998-99 they attempted only partial clustering of students (in a common competency course and, at most, one or two other courses).

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Instead, the focus was on scheduling teachers so that they could meet frequently with one another in their pathway to develop its identity and curriculum. The goal was for each pathway team to share common students in the future, a goal that was largely achieved in the 1999-2000 school year.

SCHOOL-WIDE VISION

To address staff concerns that splintering a school can lead to fragmentation and prevent a school-wide instructional focus, East Boston administrators explicitly involved all school staff in scoring writing prompts and looking at student work. At the Burke, even though staff and students were fully clustered, a strong headmaster and assistant headmaster created a school-wide focus on literacy, and the small size of the school helped create coherence. Brighton involved all pathway leaders on its instructional leadership team, made up of top administrators across the school, where, all staff agree, discussions of teaching and learning replaced the traditional attention given to operational issues. Teacher-facilitators were expected to keep minutes of all the SLC meetings and submit them to the headmaster. Occasionally, the headmaster attended SLC meetings to help address an issue: "Teachers want autonomy, but sometimes there has to be an administrative presence."

At some schools, staff are concerned about the lack of common purpose. This is an issue at Dorchester High School, an intervention school that was mandated by the district to revise its administrative structure in 2000-01.[5] Several staff expressed fear that the new structure, which promotes fuller clustering of students and greater autonomy for the SLCs, will fragment the school.

[5] At the beginning of the 1999-2000 school year, Dorchester and three other high schools were identified as "intervention" schools due to low test scores, and an intervention team, consisting of teachers and administrators from outside the school, observed school practices and made recommendations for school reforms.

This issue merits exploration. It is unclear if the concern is due to a lack of communication among SLCs, differences of opinion about the degree to which the school should reorganize, or the question of whether a common vision throughout a school is necessary for a sense of belonging and, ultimately, for a productive work environment. In addition, as schools are held accountable for student outcomes, the tendency is to move toward centralized control over curriculum and instruction. How that centralization plays out as schools create SLCs produces ongoing tension.

Finding 3: A strong curricular leader is essential to developing a strong and effective small learning community. Schools are using a variety of approaches to ensure effective leadership.

Breaking a school into sub-units demands new forms of leadership and new systems of accountability. When principals are called upon to be instructional leaders in their schools, they often say that the need to make ever-present operational decisions hampers their ability to play that role. In a decentralized school, the leadership demands are even more complex. The manner in which the schools in Boston have identified and cultivated instructional leaders has had tremendous impact on the trajectory of restructuring.

Ideally, leaders of an SLC need to know how to forge a strong sense of purpose, a curricular identity, and a capacity to solve problems collaboratively. They also need to make effective use of common planning time, collaborate with business and community partners to extend student learning outside the classroom, and involve faculty in looking at student work and instructional practices to improve student achievement. At the same time, the headmaster and assistant headmaster are usually asked to establish and maintain a common vision of high standards and a collective school identity throughout all SLCs.

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Small Learning Communities Leadership, Option One Schools, 1999-2000

School	Administrative Structure
Brighton	Each pathway is led by a teacher-facilitator who has some release time (with the exception of one pathway, led by an administrator).
Burke	Each small learning community is led by a full-time administrator; teachers and administrators lead the content area departments.
Charlestown	Each lower house unit is led by an administrator; one administrator manages the upper house.
Dorchester	Each small learning community is administered by a program director.
East Boston	One administrator leads grade 9; one administrator (with other duties) leads grade 10. The upper house is led by a program director who is assisted by two school-to-career coordinators with part-time teaching duties.

Schools with a strong, central, curricular leader parlayed that strength into developing strong leaders at the level of the SLC. At East Boston in recent years, the assistant headmaster moved from an operational role to an instructional leadership role; she was instrumental in creating a cadre of instructional leaders among the faculty. She identified faculty to lead "looking at student work" sessions and consistently provided substitutes and release time for them to do so. "You feel her commitment to professional development," said a teacher at the school. "She treats the staff as professionals, gets substitutes to cover when they're out for professional development, and generally gives them respect."

The school also explicitly used its Annenberg-funded, whole school change coaches to train other faculty to lead workshops in portfolio assessment and project-based learning; these coaches now see other faculty taking on that training role with yet another cadre of staff. The shift in the assistant headmaster's role was especially important: earlier in the restructuring, the headmaster had made the decision to transfer two administrators whose approach did not seem a good match with the school's vision of reform. This decision resulted in resistance to change among some faculty.

In schools without a central administrator who set and guided the instructional vision, SLCs were more adrift and staff complained about the lack of instructional leadership at all levels. "We don't tap the skills of the potential instructional leaders in this school," complained a Charlestown teacher. Said another, "We're not taking advantage of the talents in the building."

Brighton's experience in teasing out the role of the SLC leader is instructive. In the first year of restructuring, the pathways were led by program directors who were administrators rather than teachers. Their experiences varied, but in general these administrators reported being overwhelmed by the task of managing a pathway in addition to their other responsibilities, and some felt that time constraints hampered their ability to plan curricular connections with businesses. Not all came to the task with experience with school-to-career curricula: "I didn't even know what a competency course was," said one. Almost all agreed that cross-disciplinary teaching and learning suffered as a result. The level of purely administrative detail work was exhausting, according to several program directors. Moreover, the challenge of managing a pathway coincided with the sharply increased focus on content standards. As a result, the program directors were expected to attend district-wide meetings with greater frequency as English language arts, math, and science curriculum frameworks and standards were introduced and revised.

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In 1999-2000, to build leadership among the staff and allow department heads to be instructional leaders within and across pathways, Brighton school leaders decided to engage teachers as facilitators in all but one of its pathways. The teacher-facilitators managed the development of partnerships and the integration of partnerships into curricula. Facilitation issues have been more complicated because teacher-facilitators lack the authority of administrators. Some have felt they can't ask other, possibly more senior, teachers to try new instructional strategies. The headmaster said he had to step in periodically to help teams move forward, but he is committed to maintaining the teacher-facilitators as instructional leaders. Others agree with him, stating that teachers are less likely to operate collaboratively in a team led by an administrator than in a team led by a teacher-facilitator.

Meanwhile, the instructional leadership team helped the teacher-facilitators develop sensitive ways to bring best practices from leadership meetings to their teams, with suggestions for improving instruction. The opinions varied about the degree to which teachers and administrators inspired creativity, instructional improvement, and collaboration within their SLCs. Many interviewees agreed that restructuring into SLCs created opportunities for new leadership to emerge. Some schools, particularly the Burke, East Boston, and Brighton, received high marks for supporting newer teachers as they tried new teaching strategies. "The Burke is awesome," said one teacher. "It's a great place for veterans and for new teachers to learn good teaching." A Brighton faculty member said, "We have a lot of younger teachers here who have tried some exciting new things—and we hear about it in the instructional leadership team meetings." In many schools, the pathway teachers (who teach the so-called pathway or competency course specific to the career or industry theme) often have received training in interdisciplinary strategies and strategies for engaging students, and they are emerging as the instructional leaders in their SLCs.

However, almost all administrators voiced concern about training for the so-called middle managers who lead SLCs. The primary effort for addressing this need in 1999-2000 was the Leading the Change institute, offered by the district's Office of School-to-Career and the Office of High School Restructuring. The institute was designed to help school teams address issues of instructional and operational leadership through after-school workshop sessions throughout the year. The agenda included managing common planning time, developing each pathway's identity through signature projects, and aligning pathway courses with academic courses. Unfortunately, this effort was hampered in two ways:

- Participation in workshops was uneven. The SLC leaders had many demands on their time, including helping staff prepare appropriate lesson plans, curriculum materials, and samples of student work to showcase their teaching strategies for the various walk-throughs and visits by district administrators and outside evaluators (for example, the district's peer review process, called the in-depth review).

- A new district mandate on using formative assessment to inform instructional practice, in itself an important practice that is consistent with Boston's high school restructuring principles, came with little guidance on how best to implement it. Administrators and teachers, familiar with the use of data to evaluate their school but unfamiliar with the use of multiple sources of data to improve teaching and learning, required significant assistance on implementing this strategy. Unfortunately, many of them viewed it as something for which they would be held accountable and for which they, or their staff, were unprepared; it became a source of anxiety for institute participants. The group did not broaden the discussion to larger issues of instructional leadership because the concerns over accountability skewed their perceptions, and ongoing operational issues could not be addressed.

Given the host of leadership challenges facing teachers and administrators in a restructuring environment and an era of high-stakes testing, it is clear that professional development for leaders at all levels remains a critical issue. The Leading The Change institute was an important first step, but it could not meet the simultaneous challenges of providing leaders with skills to facilitate change and communicating about the roll-out of district-wide instructional initiatives. These goals are not incompatible, but more thought must be given to ensuring that leaders acquire knowledge about district initiatives, coupled with skills to communicate and facilitate effectively.

Finding 4: In going wall-to-wall with small learning communities, schools are balancing the desire of teachers for input into staffing decisions with the need to ensure that students have equal access to a range of pathways.

As the five Option One schools strive to create functional, cross-disciplinary teacher teams to staff the emerging SLCs, they struggle to balance issues of student equity and student and teacher choice. These issues are central to restructuring: Who decides how students and teachers are organized? How can these decisions be managed so that students from across the spectrum have access to a variety of learning environments and teachers feel some measure of control and belonging in their working relationships?

Option One schools have attempted to address these challenges in a number of ways. Brighton began by honoring all teachers' choice of pathways. When the school began to restructure in 1998-99, it did not attempt to cluster students; ensuring full coverage of content areas within each small learning community was not important. As a result, English teachers who selected Media Arts and Communication, for example, got their choice. "We built the pathway around the department," said one interviewee. Now that students are clustered and each pathway must have a math, English, social studies, and science teacher, the school has reallocated English teachers through a careful process involving a series of conversations with the program director for English language arts and the teachers themselves.

Some schools have avoided the issue of balancing teacher choice. The Burke staff decided to organize around grade levels in part because they did not want to address the staffing issue involved in letting students choose their pathways. They were concerned that the school might develop a pathway, staff it, and then have to lay off staff if students did not select that pathway. "Our staff is our most valuable resource, so we set up a structure to support them," said the headmaster.

Alternatively, Dorchester teachers expressed concerns about being assigned to pathways without having a voice in the decision. One interviewee stated that a primary reason Dorchester teachers welcomed the intervention team report, with its recommendations for school reforms, was that they felt they had not had input into pathway staffing decisions. They hope that the new administrative structure will lend more opportunities for teacher input.

Dorchester teachers aired the most apprehension about the issue of student choice in pathways. The intervention team recommended that bilingual students and students with disabilities have full access to all SLCs. In interviews, teachers expressed extreme unease about the prospect of integrating these students into their classes due to concerns that the students would be placed inappropriately and that teachers would be held accountable for the outcomes of students they weren't prepared to teach.

Schools further along in the restructuring process made more progress in addressing the twin issues of student and teacher choice. All the schools with pathways make a concerted effort to educate lower-grade students about pathway options through surveys, roundtable discussions, and classroom presentations by upper-level pathway students. Some schools found, to their surprise, that the

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size of pathways was balanced, even in schools where some pathways were better developed and offered incentives such as t-shirts and overnight study trips. Some schools had instituted controls to make certain that students didn't switch pathways recklessly: Brighton students can transfer to another pathway only in April, and they risk losing their place in their current pathway even if they don't get their transfer choice. As a result, Brighton estimates that it has an 80 to 90 percent stability rate in pathways. Staff feel they have broken the belief that certain pathways deliver more than others.

Staff in the longest-standing pathways in several schools voiced similar concerns regarding the replication of their programs through the school: the success of the pathway model would be compromised if any student could select any pathway and teachers were assigned. "This program is successful precisely because the teachers have chosen to be here and the students have to meet certain standards to stay in," said one teacher in a successful pathway. "It will go down the tubes if they change that." Staff at East Boston's travel and tourism pathway expressed concern that some pathway students do not want to be in it. The staff wished there were more options for transferring students who were unhappy with their pathway placement.

Finding 5: As schools have formed more small learning communities, bilingual programs within those schools have struggled to maintain basic services to bilingual students and to ensure equitable access to upper grade pathways; inadequate levels of staffing have compounded the problem.

One of the most vexing problems facing headmasters and directors of bilingual programs is how to make certain that bilingual students are appropriately involved in small learning communities. Traditionally, schools have clustered limited English proficiency (LEP) students in separate, transitional, bilingual programs, a structure that is designed to help students master the English language while tackling challenging academic material in their native language. This clustering often amounts to the closest a traditional, comprehensive high school comes to having an SLC: in high-quality bilingual programs, LEP students benefit from being known by a small group of teachers who often provide case management services, such as family support and career counseling.

School leaders face questions when deciding how to reorganize bilingual student education in a restructured school. For example, will upper-level LEP students have access to native language or ESL career-related pathway courses where they conduct extended projects related to a specific career field? Will this access be offered only to students with the most advanced English proficiency, or can upper-level students with less English proficiency have this opportunity as well? How will schools continue to meet legal requirements in many states to have a language assessment team meet regularly to assess bilingual student progress and make recommendations for coursework for each individual student? Will bilingual and ESL teachers share planning time with mainstream teachers in SLCs? In any case, will bilingual and ESL teachers have planning time together to address bilingual instructional issues?

Mainstreaming bilingual students who are ready for English-dominant course work is far more complicated in a restructured school. Schools with fully clustered SLCs face the dilemma of determining how best to allocate their limited number of bilingual staff throughout the SLCs to meet the needs of students who are partially mainstreamed. As LEP students emerge from bilingual programs into the mainstream, they no longer enter a monolithic high school but must choose from a set of pathways, each with its own complex curriculum.

In addition, many schools do not have the luxury to free up staff to teach native language pathway courses to upper-level LEP students. Boston bilingual directors complain that their programs are habitually understaffed,

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and the difference between the district's and the school's calculations of students and teachers can be significant. Often, this is because the numbers change significantly over the course of a school year. Several program directors told of starting every school year with an appropriate student/teacher ratio in the school, accepting new immigrant students throughout the school year until teachers filed grievances about class sizes, and finally being assigned additional staff midway through the year. The impact of this cycle was that they could not plan for such "extras" as career pathway programming. This over-enrollment happened every year, yet program directors could not convince the central office to grant staff to the school at the start of the year.

Further complicating this situation is the fact that changing demographics among Boston's bilingual student population is creating a need for different educational services. Students from outside the United States are now entering the Boston Public Schools with less formal schooling than their predecessors; students who are not literate in their native language require far more academic assistance, and for longer periods of time, than do students who have learned to read and write in their native language. According to Brighton's bilingual program director, approximately 40 percent of bilingual students with the lowest literacy are in the eleventh and twelfth grades. These older students (who would probably benefit from hands-on, relevant coursework) are less likely to be placed in career-related courses because they must focus on acquiring basic literacy skills.

There are also concerns that bilingual students do not benefit from the district's intensive literacy program for ninth-grade students. That program mandates a 10:1 student/teacher ratio for students with the lowest literacy levels, but the district has raised the student/teacher ratio in bilingual programs to 20:1. Critics say that bilingual students should benefit from the same student/teacher ratio as mainstream students with literacy problems.

How well the five Option Schools tackle these complex issues has depended, in part, on a headmaster's familiarity with the complexities of bilingual programming. Another major determining factor has been the level of clustering and expectations regarding the integration of bilingual teachers in upper-house SLCs.

Charlestown High School's headmaster and bilingual program director enjoy a close working relationship, and the bilingual director was directly involved in developing the school schedule and determining staff allocations throughout the school in 1998-99. At the same time, Charlestown surveyed its approximately 350 LEP students (about 30 percent of the student population) to assess their interest in the proposed pathway programs, assigning bilingual staff accordingly. Together, the headmaster and bilingual director decided that students with the least English proficiency would take the same pathway courses as their English-speaking peers, but in their native language. In addition, to ensure coverage of required bilingual courses, some mainstream teachers with native language ability would teach bilingual students. Unlike some restructuring schools, Charlestown also maintained common planning time for bilingual staff. This model's success—bilingual students now have access to every pathway, regardless of English language proficiency—depends on the fact that upper-level students are not clustered into a group of courses. Scheduling bilingual students into pathways at Charlestown means assigning them to a double-block class, a far easier task than trying to make certain that bilingual students are clustered into an SLC and benefit from its instructional focus, special projects, and case management.

However, this model is at risk, according to the bilingual director, because the plan next year is to double-block math courses in accordance with the superintendent's new math initiative. The director is concerned that she will have to have her upper-house pathway teachers teach lower-house math courses, a concern similar to that voiced

by administrators regarding the transition program (see Finding 1).

Brighton High School, which has sought to involve bilingual teachers in its more comprehensive pathways, ran into difficulty providing native language pathway courses to its bilingual students. Although Brighton was one of the first high schools in the country to extend its pathways to LEP students, it is struggling to staff the newly expanded pathway programs adequately. Before moving to full pathways, the school offered two, parallel, native-language pathways, one in health and one in business. Minority language students took the same pathway, or competency courses, as their mainstream peers and participated in job shadows and other work-based learning opportunities. Because academic coursework was also in the students' native language, bilingual teachers could meet as a team and develop interdisciplinary curricula. Brighton also began a dual-language, health careers program: English-language and Spanish-speaking students take competency courses simultaneously and meet together for projects. However, the move to school-wide pathways made staffing these initiatives more difficult.

Complicating matters, when the enrollment in Brighton's Vietnamese program dropped, it lost that program to another high school. Consequently, the bilingual program lost ESL teachers who would have served both Spanish- and Vietnamese-speaking students. If the school still had a large enough concentration of students in its bilingual program when it moved to full pathways, it would have the flexibility of a large bilingual teaching staff to mitigate the scheduling dilemmas. The Brighton bilingual director decided to forego regular common planning time for her bilingual staff, and instead sought to integrate her teachers into Brighton's pathway teams. She recognized that real conversations about teaching and learning were beginning to happen in those teams, and even though her staff didn't share students with other teachers in the pathways, she wanted them to be part of the conversation about improving teaching practice. Fortuitously, in 1999-2000, the headmaster found funding that allowed her team to meet after school once a week to address case management and bilingual instructional issues.

The bilingual director has been unable to find the staff to offer native language competency courses to upper-level students with the lowest English proficiency, in part because Brighton already offers a double block in math for ninth-grade students. When she fielded a survey of bilingual students to ask them which pathways they were most interested in, Brighton's bilingual program director found strong interest in business. She has developed a generic, career-related course that addresses business, communications, and basic employability topics. Next year, she will offer a second native-language competency course in technology.

Burke High School has maintained a separate house for bilingual students, and bilingual teachers meet together regularly. Bilingual department common planning time focuses on the same instructional issues addressed by the rest of the school, such as improving literacy and looking at student work; the staff members also do case management. In addition, bilingual teachers participate in common planning time with their academic departments. The bilingual program director reports that her teachers feel part of the school in a way that they had not in the past. Students with advanced English proficiency participate in pathway courses, but upper-level students without English proficiency do not.

Dorchester High's bilingual program director expressed extreme frustration with the unnecessary barriers to offering access to upper-level pathway courses to bilingual students. Although the other four Option One schools offered pathway courses to bilingual students with relatively advanced English proficiency, she could not do so because pathway courses were scheduled in conflict with upper-level ESL courses. She could not adjust the schedule

to address this problem until an outside consultant came in and explained to the staff that LEP students with advanced English proficiency (who are partially mainstreamed) should be able to participate in the competency courses in English while taking core courses in their native language. She hopes that her advanced ESL teachers will be able to participate in common planning time with pathway teams or with other English teachers to discuss what is happening in the pathways. Meanwhile, she meets regularly with her bilingual team.

East Boston has had mixed success with engaging LEP students in pathways. The part-time bilingual program director also leads the school's tenth-grade SLC. According to him, the upper-house/lower-house model at East Boston creates problems for bilingual students, who have language and academic skills that don't align with their grade level; students don't easily fit into either an upper house or a lower house. He is struggling with staffing for his core content courses and can only offer a native-language pathway course in one pathway. Travel and tourism has offered a native-language-competency course for several years, and the bilingual teacher is involved in all aspects of the program, including common planning time, planning of special projects, and case management. Otherwise, East Boston's strategy has been to select one or two pathways that are staffed, in part, by ESL teachers, and then advertise those pathways to bilingual students. In 1999-2000, teachers with ESL expertise staffed both travel and tourism and TeachBoston, the pathway to introduce students to teaching careers. Next year, the TeachBoston competency course teacher will be on maternity leave; it is unclear what other possibilities other than the travel and tourism pathway will exist for upper-level bilingual students.

The Implications for Reform

This paper looks at the opportunities and challenges faced by a group of high schools that stepped forward within a district restructuring initiative and agreed to undertake whole school reform. Although the primary focus of this exploration has been the schools themselves, a number of key challenges have surfaced that districts must address in order to provide the necessary conditions for high school reform.

ACHIEVING COHERENCE OF REFORM INITIATIVES

Under pressure to raise students' achievement levels on high stakes exams, school districts are launching multiple, simultaneous initiatives directed at high school reform. For example, in the 1998-2000 time period, the Boston Public Schools asked their high schools to implement restructuring, new literacy programs, a transition program for eighth graders whose test scores indicated a lack of readiness for high school work, and new professional development practices such as looking at student work. Such initiatives are not necessarily in conflict, except that school leaders, who have to make hard decisions about where and how to direct their limited resources, do not always understand the alignment, nor are they given guidance about how to put it into operation.

If districts are to turn the rhetoric of change into real action at the school building level, they have to understand the ways in which district mandates may conflict, or may be perceived to conflict with one another as well as with previously undertaken reform measures. As one central office interviewee in Boston stated, "I wish we had called it 'realignment' instead of 'restructuring.' People haven't understood that organizing into small learning communities is about changing the conversation about teaching and learning. They see them as separate things." For wall-to-wall high school restructuring to take root and change the ways that teachers teach and students learn,

some care must be given to making certain that staff at all levels understand and can articulate the alignment between instructional change and school structure.

BALANCING ACCOUNTABILITY WITH FLEXIBILITY AND SUPPORT

Wide-scale efforts to remake schools require flexibility and support from the districts and communities within which they operate. With the increased accountability implicit in highly publicized, school-by-school test results, school leaders feel that they have increased responsibility without greater autonomy or resources. If anything, bureaucratic requirements seem to be increasing as the number of mandates proliferates and the pressure to raise test scores increases.

In the start-up phase of reform, many small schools have survived by gaining access to additional resources from community or private sources and by gaining waivers releasing them from full compliance with the full panoply of bureaucratic procedures, rules, and requirements. These schools have also developed their own alternative measures of student performance that are more effective than test scores in demonstrating what students, especially those who have historically not performed well in school, know and can do.

Large schools attempting to remake themselves into SLCs need similar kinds of support and opportunities. Although much of this has to happen at the district level, through reconsideration of mandates and autonomy features of restructuring schools, the district can also work collaboratively with other organizations and institutions in the community to increase support to the schools undertaking fundamental reform. In Boston, for example, the Private Industry Council is an intermediary organization that has shown itself to be committed, structured, and staffed to create, support, and sustain effective school-community connections. Such organizations could play an important role in assisting schools with the transition to SLCs.

DEVELOPING NEW ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

The need for additional teacher and leadership development is also abundantly clear. New skills are demanded in a restructuring school at all levels, from principal, to SLC leader, to department chair, to teacher. Principals must practice distributive leadership, developing leaders among their administrators and trying out new decision-making processes. SLC leaders must attend to the administrative demands of running a small school while serving as instructional leaders. Department chairs must continue to be responsible for their content area while working effectively across SLCs. Teachers have to work in teams, discussing instructional practices and individual students. All of these demands inevitably require significant resources.

PROVIDING FOR TEACHER AND STUDENT CHOICE

Students are more likely to succeed if taught by teachers who elect to participate in a particular pathway or cluster. Some schools in Boston have taken small steps towards teacher reassignment, phasing in new teacher clusters over several years. Districts with restructuring schools need to determine ways to reassign teachers that respect teachers' capabilities and interests, and they need to provide the professional development that teachers may need to adjust to new teaching demands.

Similarly, students will not learn effectively if required to remain in a pathway program that no longer interests them. A major premise of theme-based SLCs is that students must be interested in the theme. Thus far, Brighton High School, the only Boston high school that had fully clustered students into SLCs at the time covered in this paper, had figured out how to give students some

choice of pathways while maintaining a fairly stable student population in each pathway from year to year. Other schools must develop strategies to address this dilemma as they move to further cluster their students.

Appendix

METHODOLOGY

To research this paper, the author conducted interviews at each of the five schools. Staff interviewed at each of the high schools included, at minimum, the headmaster, assistant headmaster, bilingual program director, school-to-career director, and teachers. Whenever possible, the school's director of special education was also interviewed. Key personnel interviewed at the district offices included the Director of School-to-Career and her key staff, the Director of Bilingual Education, and the High School Restructuring Coordinator. The director of the Boston Private Industry Council, a key player in high school reform efforts in Boston, was also interviewed. Interviews were conducted during the months of April and May 2000. A complete list of interview questions is included below.

In addition to the interviews, the author reviewed relevant documents and materials on the high school restructuring initiative in Boston. These include, for example, the report of the High School Restructuring Task Force and comprehensive school plans and end-of-year restructuring reports submitted to the district. Finally, in her capacity as liaison to the Boston community for Jobs for the Future, the author attended district- and school-level meetings focused on high school reform.

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: DISTRICT INFORMANTS

1 Progress made by Option One schools in past two years
   - organization/structure
   - leadership
   - culture (throughout schools and within SLCs)
   - student experiences
   - teaching
   - connections to community
   - variability among schools

2 Challenges and dilemmas or trade-offs emerging in restructuring effort
   - district level
   - school level

3 Solutions that have emerged

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: SCHOOL INFORMANTS

1 Progress made by Option One schools in past two years
   - small learning communities
   - leadership
   - transition program
   - instructional practices
   - impact of MCAS
   - schedules
   - bilingual/SPED/other special populations
   - district role

2 Challenges and dilemmas or trade-offs emerging in restructuring effort

3 Solutions that have emerged

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The LAB develops educational products and services for school administrators, policymakers, teachers, and parents in New England, New York, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Central to our efforts is a commitment to equity and excellence.

Information about LAB programs and services is available by contacting:

LAB at Brown University
The Education Alliance
222 Richmond Street, Suite 300
Providence, RI 02903-4226

Phone: 800/521-9550
E-mail: info@lab.brown.edu
Web: www.lab.brown.edu
Fax: 401/421-7650

Jobs for the Future (JFF) is a LAB partner organization. JFF is a national non-profit organization that works to strengthen the foundation for economic opportunity and civic health in America by advancing the understanding of the skills and knowledge required for success in the new economy. JFF works locally and nationally to develop innovative workforce development solutions that help people make effective lifelong transitions between work and learning.

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Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory

a program of The Education Alliance at Brown University

Adeline Becker
Executive Director, The Education Alliance

Mary-Beth Fafard
Interim Executive Director, The LAB at Brown University
Associate Director, The Education Alliance

Vincent Ferrandino
Chair, LAB Board of Governors

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Vice Chair, LAB Board of Governors

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Jill Tarule
Alicia Smith Wallace
David Wolk

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THE EDUCATION ALLIANCE

222 Richmond Street, Suite 300

Providence, RI 02903-4226

Phone: 401/274-9548

Fax: 401/421-7650

E-mail: info@lab.brown.edu

Web: www.lab.brown.edu

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